

Introduction to Symposium: 'Working together for ecological outcomes in the International Year of Cooperatives', 17/18 November 2012

The Editors

As an activity in the International Year of Cooperatives, a symposium on the theme of achieving ecological outcomes seems a fitting one. In the area of natural history study and research it is often through the banding together of a number of groups to work in cooperation that results are obtained. We live in a world where government agencies can (or are prepared to) put only limited resources toward the study, enhancement or protection of the natural estate. In this situation, there is much to be gained, therefore, through the benefits of collective action. A program of action that draws together the coordinated efforts of a range of volunteers, friends groups, public interest groups and field naturalist clubs, working in conjunction with relevant government agencies, is an effective option. Cooperatives can work on different fronts at the same time and often serve a wider range of interests. Many instances of such advantages became apparent at the 2012 FNCV Biodiversity Symposium.

Trust for Nature works at both a broad brush and specific level. Ecosystems such as the heathlands near Anglesea on Victoria's south coast are protected through the acquisition of substantial blocks of land containing the native vegetation; at the same time, in other areas, specific plants such as Little Pink Spider-orchid and Fairy Lanterns are the subject of other exercises in cooperative management.

In biodiversity studies, there generally, there is often an imbalance as to which animals are the focus. It is often landmark animals such as Leadbeater's Possum that receive greater

attention in terms of conservation. Although Victoria's faunal emblem is at risk of extinction and may ultimately rely on the support of its Friends group, working conjointly with others of like mind, it is an example of how 'cute' animals draw attention. Bats, the second largest order of mammals, are a regular focus of field-work by volunteers, and the subject of study by a number of groups.

The less obvious fauna such as most invertebrates are less attractive. Notwithstanding this apparent neglect, as Yen and New show, there have been a number of effective programs to ensure the survival of some invertebrates. These have drawn on the expertise and varying time availability of a range of participants including members of the FNCV, local land managers, friends groups, and individual volunteers.

Although not all of the papers presented at the Symposium are reproduced in this issue, those included here cover a wide range of subjects within the natural world. From invertebrates to mammals, a single plant species to entire ecosystems, on both public and private land, cooperatives of individuals and groups have spent many hours working toward mutually desirable goals, and have achieved ecological outcomes. Although the International Year to highlight and acknowledge such efforts has concluded, it is anticipated that the efforts themselves will continue into the foreseeable future.

As the Symposium amply illustrated, there is much to be gained in natural history by acting in a cooperative, concerted and continuing manner.